

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Bonita Creek Route

EA Number: AZ 410-2005-0034
Lease/Serial/Case File No.
Applicant: BLM
BLM Office: Safford Field Office
Location of Proposed Action: Bonita Creek

Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan

This proposed action is subject to the following land use plan:

Name of Plan: Safford District Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement.

Date Approved: Record of Decision (ROD) Part I, September 1992; Record of Decision Part II, July 1994.

The proposed action has been reviewed to determine if it conforms with the applicable land use plan as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

This plan is in conformance with the applicable land use plan:

CHECK ONE
(X) YES () NO

Remarks: Designate six areas as Special Recreation Management Areas to manage current recreation use. These areas include Bonita Creek. RMP page 37. Partial ROD I page 7.

The Safford District will endeavor to provide a variety of recreational opportunities that meet public demand and are compatible with the Bureau's stewardship responsibilities. Partial ROD I page 7.

PURPOSE/NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of this project is to develop a hiking route along Bonita Creek from Lee Trailhead to Pueblo Duval by trimming and clearing brush. Due to beaver dams, areas along the creek are so overgrown that a hiker cannot get through. Hazardous spikes left over from previous tree cutting activities are a safety concern to both hikers and horse back riders. Total route length is 8 miles.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action:

Develop a hiking route by clearing brush along Bonita Creek from Lee Trailhead to Pueblo Devol. No ground disturbance would occur. No trees over 6 inches in diameter would be cut. Minimal cutting and trimming would occur using the path of least resistance. Area to be cleared would allow for a horse and rider to pass through (4 feet wide by 8 feet high). Work would be accomplished by SFO staff and volunteers using a chain saw and various hand tools. Route would need annual maintenance.

No Action Alternative: Areas along the creek would continue to be so overgrown that hikers and horseback riders cannot get through. Spikes left over from previous tree cutting activities would continue to be a safety hazard for both hikers and horseback riders.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Determine Scope of the Assessment: Internal review by the Safford Field Office NEPA Team. Route has been flagged for site visits.

Issues Identified:

No ground disturbance means that no digging or other invasive activities would occur to disturb the route surface. We are planning to start the project in May 2005. Trimming and brush removal will generally occur away from the creek except where needed at creek crossings. Beavers should not be impacted by loss of food or building materials because the route will be along the path of least resistance and usually away from the creek except at occasional crossings and will only be 4 feet wide. The route is currently very difficult and dangerous to traverse due to debris from recent flooding, brush, and spiked tree trunks.

Critical Elements:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS (required by federal law)	AFFECTED		CRITICAL ELEMENTS (required by federal law)	AFFECTED	
	YES	NO		YES	NO
ACECS		x	Solid Waste		x
Air Quality		x	T&E Animal		x
Cultural Res		x	T&E Plant		x
Environmental Justice Socioeconomics		x	VRM		x
Flood Plains		x	Water Quality		x

Hazardous Materials		x	Wetland/Riparian		x
Invasive/Noxious Plants		x	Wilderness		x
Native American Rel.		x	Wild & Scenic River		x
Prime/Unique Farmland		x			

Description of Impacts

Proposed Action:

Soil and Water Resources: There will be some soil disturbance during brush removal. The soil displacement will be temporary and of minimal impact.

Riparian Vegetation: Crew would only be trimming and clearing brush. No trees larger than 6 inches in diameter will be cut. Minimal cutting would occur since the route would be along the path of least resistance. Trimming will only occur near the creek at necessary crossings or in areas where the canyon narrows and allows no other route.

Wildlife: There will be a minimum disturbance to wildlife due to chain saw noise, brush removal.

Cultural: See attached form.

Recreation: Trimming and clearing brush along Bonita Creek would provide a passable route for recreational hikers and horseback riders from Lee Trailhead to Pueblo Devol.

Visual Resources: The Gila Box RNCA is designated as a Visual Resource Management Class II area. This route is entirely within the Gila Box RNCA. Clearing and trimming brush, removing spiked tree stumps on land and leveling off the spiked stumps in the water (above the water line) are within the constraints of visual resource management class II objectives.

No Action Alternative:

Soil and Water Resources: No Impact

Riparian Vegetation: Brush and debris would continue to block access along Bonita Creek from Lee Trailhead to Pueblo Devol.

Wildlife: No Impact

Cultural: No Impact

Recreation: The area of Bonita Creek from Lee Trailhead to Pueblo Devol would continue to be difficult and almost impassable for hikers and horseback riders to navigate.

Visual Resources: No Impact

Cumulative Impacts

Proposed Action: Clearing and trimming the brush along a route from Bonita Creek from Lee Trailhead to Pueblo Devol will provide a passable route to hikers and horseback riders. Annual maintenance will insure that the route remains passable. Removing spiked tree stumps on land and leveling off the spiked stumps in the water could prevent serious injuries to hikers and riders.

No Action Alternative: If no action is taken, hikers and horseback riders will continue to have a very difficult time traveling along Bonita Creek from Lee Trailhead to Pueblo Devol. Without trimming the brush the route could become virtually inaccessible. The trunk spikes left by beavers would continue to be a hazard to both hikers and horseback riders.

Mitigating Measures

Persons/Agencies Consulted: SFO Nepa Team

References: BLM 1991. Safford District Resource Management Plan, Environmental Impact Statement.

List of Preparers: Deborah Morris, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Date:

FONSI/DECISION RECORD

EA Number: AZ-410-2005-0034

Lease/Serial/Case File No. N/A

BLM Office: Safford Field Office

DECISION:

It is my decision to implement the proposed action as described and stipulated in Environmental Assessment AZ-040-2004-0016. Implementing the proposed action will improve water flow in the channel and to the pond at the Hot Well Dunes Recreation Area. This will enhance wildlife habitat, provide an area for wildlife viewing, and provide water to the grazing permittee. The proposed action includes clearing the existing channel from the tubs to the pond and installing a 3" pipeline from the channel ½ mile west of the tubs to the access road. The pipeline will follow the road for approximately ½ mile, then tie into the channel again just above the pond. The proposed action resolves defined issues, meets the purpose and need for action, and will not affect any critical elements and other resources described within the Environmental Assessment.

There are no adverse energy impacts.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS:

Based upon Environmental Assessment AZ-040-2004-0016, I conclude that this action is in conformance with the approved land use plan, the Safford District Resource Management Plan, and will result in no significant impact to the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

MITIGATION MEASURES:

The channel will need to be completed before mid March 2004 to minimize disturbance of amphibian egg sacks. Any archaeological or historical artifacts or remains, or vertebrate fossils discovered during construction shall be left intact and undisturbed, all work in the area shall stop immediately, and the Assistant Field manager for Planning and Monitoring shall be notified immediately. Commencement of operations shall be allowed upon clearance by the Assistant Field Manager.

COMPLIANCE MONITORING:

Safford Field Office staff will monitor and document the facility for visitor compliance, resource protection, and maintenance requirements on at least a monthly basis.

/s/ Wayne King _____

January 23, 2004

Assistant Field Manager Resource Use and Protection

Date